Affordable Housing Policy 2010

City of Whitehorse

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1. City of Whitehorse Affordable Housing Policy 2010

The purpose of this policy is to clearly articulate the things Whitehorse City Council is doing, will do, or will consider doing, to support affordable housing within the municipality.

The policy is an internal policy. It has been developed in consultation with Councillors and Officers. It builds on the approach established in the City of Whitehorse *Affordable and Social Housing Policy 2002* (Appendix A); it also reflects the breadth of work Council has undertaken *since* the 2002 policy was adopted. The updated policy will provide direction to officers and explicitly state how Council will support affordable housing into the future.

Within this policy, affordable housing is seen as existing along a continuum. It includes affordable homes for purchase (including higher density and more diverse housing); affordable private rental; and social housing (for more information, refer to Appendix B or C).

2. Principles and Policy Statements

This policy has been guided by the following principle:

Whitehorse City Council is committed to increasing the supply of affordable housing in the municipality.

Council will deliver on this commitment as follows:

- Council will support affordable housing in land use planning;
- Council will regulate rooming houses;
- Council will form, facilitate and support partnerships to deliver affordable housing;
- Council will advocate for affordable housing.

In short, Council has defined its role(s) as:

- Planner;
- Regulator;
- Partner/supporter;
- Advocate.

Council's approach within each of these roles is defined in Table 1.

Table 1 – How Council will support affordable housing

Role	Approach / Policy Statement
Planner	Develop a local planning policy encouraging affordable housing for inclusion in the Whitehorse Planning Scheme.
Planner	Continue to identify opportunities for affordable housing in designated structure plans. Where appropriate, provide greater detail to encourage a mix of low cost rental accommodation (through registered housing associations) as well as areas of greater diversity/density.
Regulator	Develop a coordinated approach to the regulation of rooming houses within Whitehorse.
Partner / Supporter	Identify suitable Council owned sites (including existing social housing sites and airspace) and consider partnerships between the

	State Government, housing associations/providers and other relevant parties to deliver affordable housing. Subject to suitable arrangements/circumstances, Council may consider: • Lease arrangements at less than market rent for periods up to 50 years; • Transfer of land title. This will be considered on a case by case basis with lease arrangements preferential to land transfer.
Partner / Supporter	Identify appropriate and underutilised non-Council owned sites (including airspace) and consider the negotiation of joint ventures or public-private partnerships between the land owner, state government, housing associations and providers, financier and other relevant parties to deliver affordable housing.
Advocacy	Continue to monitor and advocate for current and future housing needs.
Advocacy	Continue to promote the benefits of housing diversity and affordability.

The following section provides a brief summary and rationale for each of these approaches.

3. Rationale

Planner

Develop a local planning policy encouraging affordable housing for inclusion in the Whitehorse Planning Scheme.

Description

This involves a planning scheme amendment. Once the local policy is in place, Statutory Planners within Council will need to consider the policy in their assessment of planning permit applications. The 'stronger' the final wording of the local policy, the greater the position of planners to negotiate affordable housing provision from developers and to place conditions on permits for the provision of affordable housing.

Rationale

- VC1 amendment to Clause 16 of the State Planning Policy Framework provides the necessary state support for this approach;
- A stronger basis for negotiated outcomes for the inclusion of affordable housing in developments. This may include negotiating planning concessions in exchange for the provision of affordable housing;
- Builds on the current approach - Whitehorse already has local planning policies that refer to the need for affordable housing (*Student Housing Policy 2009, Housing Study 2003*).

Continue to identify opportunities for affordable housing in designated structure plans. Where appropriate, provide greater detail to encourage a mix of low cost rental accommodation (through registered housing associations) as well as areas of greater diversity/density.

Description

Most of the structure plans prepared by the City of Whitehorse identify affordable housing as an objective however the affordable housing principles and policies within these could be strengthened. Where appropriate, the structure plan might:

- Identify specific housing needs and suitable locations for sub-categories of affordable housing such as student accommodation, key worker housing, aged care facilities, etc.;
- Identify suitable land/airspace for affordable housing, including Council land, State Government land and major development sites;
- Identify specific locations where developer concessions could be provided where affordable housing is included as part of the development (e.g. in locations adjacent to employment or transport).

Rationale

- A stronger basis for negotiated outcomes that include affordable housing in developments;
- Gives Council the opportunity to influence the location of affordable housing;
- Builds on and consolidates the current approach;
- Provide greater certainty and clarify expectations for future development.

Regulator

Develop a coordinated approach to the regulation of rooming houses.

Description

Three departments at Council have responsibility for rooming houses – Environmental Health (under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act)*, Building (through various building codes and regulations) and Planning. This is to consider collectively how these responsibilities interact and how Council can proactively respond to the growth in rooming house accommodation.

Rationale

- Council meets it's legislative and regulatory obligations;
- Potential and existing rooming house operators and better understand what is required of them;
- Increased safety and amenity in rooming houses.

Partner and Supporter

Identify suitable Council owned sites (including existing social housing sites and airspace) and consider partnerships between the State Government, housing associations/providers and other relevant parties to deliver affordable housing. Subject to suitable arrangements/circumstances Council may consider:

- *Lease arrangements at less than market rent for periods up to 50 years;*
- *Transfer of land title.*

This will be considered on a case by case basis with lease arrangements preferential to land transfer.

Description

This allows Council to contribute to and enter partnerships to deliver affordable housing.

Transfer arrangements would need to comply with the relevant provisions of the Local Government Act.

Rationale

- More effective use of underutilised land;
- Allows Council to consider how it supports and provides the social housing it currently owns into the future;
- May position Council and/or a housing association to attract investment to the municipality;
- May provide a housing association with leverage to deliver more affordable housing (i.e. for other projects or additional units);
- May allow existing stock to be upgrade and improved at no cost to Council;
- Increases affordable housing stock;
- Creates opportunities for integrated and mixed use developments in appropriate locations;
- Opportunities can be considered on a case by case basis;
- *Box Hill Transit City Activity Centre Structure Plan (2007)* already identifies opportunities for partnerships on Council-owned land, including with adjoining land owners.

Identify appropriate and underutilised non-Council owned sites (including airspace) and consider the negotiation of joint ventures or public-private partnerships between the land owner, state government, housing associations and providers, financier and other relevant parties to deliver affordable housing.

Description

Council identifies opportunities for affordable housing on non-Council sites within the municipality and helps facilitate partnerships to deliver it.

Rationale

- More effective use of underutilised land;
- Increases affordable housing stock;
- Creates opportunities for integrated developments in appropriate locations;
- May help attract investment (Government or otherwise) to the municipality;
- Helps deliver on affordable housing that has already been identified in structure plans.

Advocate

Continue to monitor and advocate for current and future housing needs.

Description

Council will continue to monitor and advocate for more affordable housing in the municipality. This includes participation on the Eastern Region Affordable Housing Alliance.

Rationale

- The City of Whitehorse and the Eastern region generally has low levels of affordable housing, and in particular social housing, relative to other areas in metropolitan Melbourne.

Continue to promote the benefits of housing diversity and affordability.

Description

Council undertake community engagement and education activities to promote the benefits of affordable housing.

Rationale

- Council has a commitment to support affordable housing;
- Affordable housing is often perceived poorly in the community;
- Community resistance to housing can be a barrier to housing projects progressing.

4. Background Information

State and Federal Government

The State and Federal Governments have by far the biggest role in the provision of affordable housing. The Federal Government influences housing distribution through macro-economic policy, taxation and income support, assistance to homeowners, industry policy and the National Affordable Housing Agreement. The State Government has responsibility for the provision and management of public housing, not for profit sector housing regulation and legislation, landlord-tenant relations and statutory and strategic planning frameworks. The State Government also has responsibility for accessibility standards through the building commission.

Refer to Appendix B and C for a more detailed discussion of the key federal and state government policy mechanisms and funding streams that support or influence affordable housing.

Regional Context

The City of Whitehorse is part of the Eastern Region Affordable Housing Alliance (established in 2010), which includes representatives from the Whitehorse, Maroondah, Boroondara, Manningham, Monash, Knox, Stonington and Yarra Ranges Councils. The Alliance advocates for improved housing affordability in the Eastern Metropolitan Region to respond to current and future housing needs.

Prior to the alliance, the region, in collaboration with the State Government developed the *Eastern Region Housing Statement (2006).* This document articulated a vision for the region in which a diverse range of housing met the needs of *all* current and future residents.

Local Context

Whitehorse City Council has committed to support affordable housing in a number of strategic planning documents. These include:

- The City of Whitehorse *Affordable and Social Housing Policy 2002*. This policy commits Council to working in partnership on housing initiatives, facilitating local affordable housing solutions and advocacy.
- *The City of Whitehorse Housing Study (2003)*, which has been incorporated in the Whitehorse Planning Scheme. Key objectives are increasing housing diversity and increasing density around activity centres.
- The *Box Hill Transit City Activity Centre Structure Plan (2007)*. This identifies affordable housing as an important issue facing Box Hill and highlights opportunities for to its provision, including on Council-owned land and in partnership with adjoining land owners.
- *Nunawading MegaMile Major Activity Centre and Mitcham Neighbourhood Activity Centre Structure Plan (2008)*. This identifies the limited affordable housing and independent living/aged care options in the activity centre. The Structure Plan names specific sites which may be appropriate for affordable housing, delivered in partnership between Whitehorse City Council and a registered housing provider.
- *Tally Ho Urban Design Framework (2007)*. This Framework, prioritises affordable and aged-care housing;
- *Burwood Heights Activity Centre Structure Plan (2006)*, which requires a mix of housing types and sizes;
- *Student Housing Policy (2009)* and related Local Policy in the Planning Scheme;
- *Eastern Region Housing Statement (2006)*. This articulates the need to increase the supply of affordable housing in the Eastern Metropolitan Region.
- *Youth Plan 2009-2013, Positive Ageing Strategy (2006-2001), Disability Policy and Action Plan 2008-201*. These Plans identify the need for appropriate housing for specific groups (youth, older people and people with a disability).

Council also owns social housing at the following locations: 37 Bennett St, Gowanlea and Combarton St. 37 Bennet St is leased to Harrison Family Services to provide short term transitional accommodation for people in housing crisis. Both Gowanlea and Combarton St are managed by Council. Gowanlea provides self contained accommodation for older people. It comprises 34 units for singles and 4 for couples; a large portion of residents are Chinese. Combarton St Rooming House provides rooming house-style accommodation for single people over 25 years of age and has capacity for 11 residents.